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To: Microsoft ATR
Date: 1/26/02 3:24pm
Subject: Microsoft Settlement

I oppose the proposed Microsoft settlement.

There are a number of problems with the proposed settlement, but I will focus on just one here: the lack of a requirement to force Microsoft to make their file formats available.

Today it is virtually impossible to find a word processor or presentation package other than Microsoft Word or Powerpoint. They do exist, but they are niche products and their vendors are barely able to survive. It is also virtually impossible to obtain venture capital to start a new business competing with Microsoft in these areas.

This is bad news for consumers. More competition is sorely needed in these markets.

There is one major barrier to entry in these markets: the Microsoft file formats. In order to compete with Microsoft Office products, vendors must make their products "compatible" with Word, Powerpoint, Excel and the rest of the Microsoft Office suite. And making products "compatible" requires expensive reverse-engineering of Microsoft's proprietary file formats. It can be done, but it rarely succeeds 100%, which steers consumers and venture capitalists away from alternative products.

If Microsoft made their file formats publicly available, other vendors would be able to write word processors and other office products that were 100% compatible and thus competitive with those from Microsoft. This would be good for other vendors, good for Microsoft, and especially good for consumers, since there is virtually no competition in this marketplace now.

I do not advocate that Microsoft make their office suite "open source"--they can still maintain their proprietary advantage in the products themselves, but the particulars of the files that their products create should be made known. This will in no way hamper Microsoft's ability to compete in these markets, but it will encourage competition which does not exist today.

I would not advocate that a company release proprietary information of this nature were it not a monopoly and thus a de facto standard in the industry. If healthy competition existed, there would be no need to release the file formats. But Microsoft clearly has a monopoly in this market which will persist unless these file formats are made public, and other remedies beyond those in the proposed settlement are put into place.

Thank you,

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